

PYPAG Meeting Summary
Monday, October 5, 2009

PYPAG Members in attendance:

Joe Bondi
Michael Caison
Richard Calderon
Allison Cryor DiNardo
Garrett Erdle
Bill Hendrickson
Deborah Johnson
Dan McCaffery
Jennifer Mitchell
Crystall Merlino
Peter Pocock
Mariella Posey
Frederick Rothmeijer
Noah Teates
Eric Wagner
Maria Wasowski

PYPAG Members not in attendance:

Darryl Dugan
Mark Krause
Jon Lindgren

City Staff:

Tom Canfield
Bethany Carton
Jeffrey Farner
Claire Gron
Claudia Hamblin-Katnik
Mark Jinks
Sandra Marks
Kristen Mitten
Valerie Peterson

The Perspectives Group Staff:

Doug Sarno

Approximately 15 Members of the Public were in attendance.

Open House & Overview of Model

The Potomac Yard Planning Advisory Group (PYPAG) meeting was preceded by an informal open house and model discussion which began at approximately 6:00 p.m.

Welcome

The PYPAG meeting began at 6:35 p.m. Doug Sarno, the facilitator, welcomed the group. There were 16 PYPAG members in attendance.

Setting the Stage

Mr. Sarno provided a brief introduction and background. He reminded PYPAG that the long-term Vision for Potomac Yard will be realized over 20-30 years. He stated that the PYPAG Vision assumes that a Metrorail station will be located at Potomac Yard, and that funding the Metrorail station is a matter for the City.

Bill Hendrickson noted that the PYPAG plan, therefore, is an all-or-nothing plan. Jennifer Mitchell questioned if there is a certain level of development which is acceptable without a Metrorail station.

Mr. Sarno reviewed the upcoming PYPAG schedule through February 2010, when the small area plan is expected to be presented before the Planning Commission and City Council.

Plan Concept Overview

Jeffrey Farner, P&Z, generally summarized elements of the proposed plan which had been discussed in more detail at the October 1, 2009 PYPAG meeting. He discussed density, heights, uses, and open space. He noted that the plan area is organized around three neighborhoods – Metro Square, Market, and Gateway.

General Feedback

Mr. Sarno solicited feedback on the proposed plan.

Mariella Posey asked if affordable housing is included in the plan. Mr. Farner stated that for the current proposed plan, the City estimates an approximately \$25 million voluntary affordable housing contribution from the developer. He stated that City Council will decide if affordable housing will be provided on- or off-site.

Michael Caison questioned if there is a way to ensure that all promised amenities are delivered, such that different interests are not competing with one another. Specifically, he asked if a methodology could be put in place to ensure an affordable housing contribution. Mr. Farner stated that the plan will be approved with conditions such that the development will be obligated to provide the promised amenities.

Richard Calderon requested additional information concerning why Metrorail station aerial location (option D) was no longer being considered. Mr. Farner stated that option D is not viable when density, cost, feasibility, and constructability are considered. Eric Wagner, who is also a member of the Potomac Yard Metrorail Station Feasibility Work Group, stated that option D is off the table.

Ms. Posey stated that she felt the proposed density (2.5 FAR) was too high, and that the plan does not propose adequate open space. Mr. Calderon stated that he felt that 250 ft. tall buildings are too high. Noah Teates stated that he felt that Potomac Yard is a desirable area to locate tall buildings. Mr. Hendrickson stated that there might be ways of redistributing the height and providing additional open space. Mr. Farner stated that the FAA height restrictions, the preference for lower heights on Route 1, and the preference for heights stepping down to the GW Parkway all influenced proposed building heights. Dan McCaffery stated that he can prepare graphics which more accurately depict building heights than the model.

David Fromm questioned if a density bonus would be provided which would allow the developer to exceed the 2.5 FAR. He asked what percent of the site is dedicated to open space, and how this compares to the rest of Potomac Yard. He also asked if a school would be provided. Mr. Wagner stated that these issues can be discussed in more detail during the small group discussion.

Mr. Wagner stated that PYPAG must come to an agreement with respect to density and height. Mr. Caison stated that to determine whether the density was appropriate, he needed a better understanding of what amenities will be provided in exchange. Mr. Calderon questioned what kinds of amenities would be provided if the density was 6 million sq. ft. instead of 7 million sq. ft. Mr. Farner stated that if PYPAG believes that the density of the proposed plan needs to be lowered, staff needs this direction now. Maria Wasowski reminded the group that PYPAG wants Metro, and asked how much density is needed to support a Metrorail station.

A member of the public questioned why the City is not pursuing a density 5.0 FAR (14 million square feet) as proposed by the Mayor's Institute on City Design. Mr. Farner stated that a 5.0 FAR is twice the density that is proposed with the current plan. He said that staff considered if there was a market for, if the transportation system could support, and whether it would be consistent with general planning principles discussed through this process to located 14 million square feet on the site. Staff determined that a 5.0 FAR was not viable.

Mr. Wagner reiterated that PYPAG must come to a consensus on density. Deborah Johnson questioned the minimum density that would produce enough ridership to support a Metrorail station. Ms. Mitchell stated that the feasibility of a Metrorail station is a financial problem, not a ridership problem. Allison DiNardo

expressed concern that the density could be lowered to the point that it would not be dense enough for Metro.

Mr. Sarno stated that the proposed heights were developed by working within certain parameters (previously mentioned). Mr. Calderon stated that he does not feel that massing along the GW Parkway is offensive. Mr. Fromm noted that a concern for shadows and building orientation does not necessarily translate to a concern for building height. Mr. Calderon agreed that his concern relates to building orientation more than building height.

Ms. Posey asked if the City would have to pay for land at Potomac Yard in order to build a school. Mr. Farner stated that the project will generate additional students. He stated that options for constructing a school at Potomac Yard could include City funding and developer contributions.

Mr. Calderon asked about the financial feasibility of constructing a Metrorail station at Potomac Yard. Mr. Jinks stated that, in the long term, there is a tax revenue surplus due to the construction of a Metrorail station at Potomac Yard. However, in the short term, there is a major funding gap.

Small Group Discussion

PYPAG divided into three small groups for detailed topic discussions.

Report Back, Discussion, and Public Comment

Group: Open Space, Civic Uses, Sustainability

- Publicly accessible open space is preferable to private open space.
- Concern was voiced that the ground level open space for this large development was minimal.
- The use of rooftop space should be maximized, for example, for green roofs or roof gardens, and public access should be explored.
- Streets should use pervious surfacing treatment instead of asphalt.
- Parks should be useful.
- The plan should consider if a school is needed.
- There is inadequate provision of playing fields.
- Potomac Yard should be a model for sustainability, and should strive to have a net zero impact (e.g., with respect to water, stormwater, and energy).
- Generally, the plan should specify requirements for amenities, not goals. Minimum requirements for open space need to be established and included in the plan.
- Civic amenities need to be listed in the plan to ensure they are included in the final product (e.g., affordable housing, open space, etc.).
- Integrate schools with other civic uses.

Group: Circulation, Connectivity, Neighborhood Impacts

- Roads should be kept open and connected; support general concept of greater connectivity.
- Reed Avenue should connect to Potomac Avenue.
- The intersection of Reed Avenue and Route 1 should be opened (full vehicular movement), and the possibility of opening additional closed intersections should be explored. Other intersections to explore opening, in priority order, include: Evans, Wesmond, and Lynhaven.
- A traffic calming plan should be developed to mitigate the effects of development at Potomac Yard, should be appropriately phased with development, and should look beyond the immediate neighborhoods. The traffic calming plan should include non-speed bump traffic calming mechanisms.
- BRT stations should be deployed at locations as proposed by staff.
- Staff's plan is preferable to the applicant's plan, and should ensure that BRT riders are protected from the elements as they transfer between BRT and Metro.

Group: Site Planning (buildings at Metro, Reed Ave connection, heights, gateways)

- The area surrounding Metro Square is more effective as portrayed in Staff's plan. Staff needs to address issues of connectivity from BRT to Metro.
- If buildings are located on the east side of Potomac Avenue as portrayed in applicant's plan, the plan needs to address pedestrian safety and the connectivity of the Metrorail station to development on the west side of Potomac Avenue.
- Concern that staff's plan creates a back door to the Parkway, and closes off greenspace.
- The group is opposed to the complete closing of Reed Avenue at Potomac Avenue.
- Opportunities for further stepping back upper levels of buildings on Route 1 should be explored.
- Orientation of buildings is important. Need to maximize opportunities for access to sunlight at the street level. A shadow study should be conducted.

Next Steps

Mr. Sarno reminded PYPAG members that there is an upcoming Community Meeting on Tuesday, October 20, 2009, which will be posted by PYPAG. He asked that volunteers arrive at 5:30pm, and please email staff if they are planning to attend. Mr. Sarno stated that the draft plan will be released in early November.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:35 pm.